

**ILLINOIS FIRST  
JOINT SESSION REMARKS  
Governor George H. Ryan**

**Tuesday, May 4, 1999**

Speaker Madigan; President Philip; Rep. Daniels; Sen. Jones; Members of the General Assembly; My fellow citizens of Illinois: Thus far in this legislative session, the partnership we've created has been fruitful.

In the last 112 days, you and I have worked to put away the partisan differences of the past.

We have started to concentrate on the future.

When I stood before you in February, I promised you that I would cross party lines; keep an open door to everyone; and to keep an open mind to all ideas.

I laid out an agenda to use Illinois' resources wisely for the good of the people of this State.

You responded with a willingness to listen, to discuss and to accept new proposals.

Together, we have developed a new spirit of good will in the Capitol ending the bickering and rancor that has marked past legislative sessions.

And while I have not embraced all of your ideas and you have not agreed to all of mine, the door to my office and to the Executive Mansion has been and is open.

And, we have worked together to pass meaningful legislation.

Together, we have made a good start on the road to the 21st Century.

Thanks to the leadership of Sen. Maitland and Rep. Smith, this General Assembly overcame years of acrimony and contentious partisan debate to finally approve legislation to better regulate large-scale livestock operations.

I will sign that bill.

And, thanks to the leadership of Sen. Mahar and representatives Durkin and Lang, this General Assembly sent a decisive message by passing our "Child Access Prevention" proposal.

It will keep unsupervised guns out of the hands of children.

I will quickly sign the bill into law.

In the last weeks of this session, I look forward to many more accomplishments for Illinois.

I look forward to an agreement on the new Open lands Trust to help preserve our natural heritage.

I look forward to new laws that will help put an end to the senseless gun violence on our streets and in our schools.

I look forward to new tools that the state can use to help keep Illinois' economy strong and prosperous.

And I look forward to a balanced state budget that dedicates 52 percent of all new revenues to education, and funds all essential state services and still maintains a healthy bank balance.

As I promised last year -- we are building a new Illinois together.

We have much to do.

That is why I am here today.

Back in February, I told you about my desire to create a new program in state government that would help us, and our partners in local government, to meet the critical infrastructure needs we have in Illinois.

Right now, 89 percent of the 4,100 school buildings in Illinois need repairs.

Right now, 74 percent of our interstate highways have surpassed their 20-year design lifespan.

Right now, we have a backlog of 2,400 miles of arterial roads that need repair.

We have 750 bridges that need to be fixed.

43 percent of the state's rivers and the vast majority of our lakes are only rated as being in "fair" environmental condition.

That's not acceptable.

We cannot allow that to continue.

As we found out last winter, our mass transit system desperately needs repair.

We need to expand our transit options if we're going to continue to fight for cleaner air, economic development and to move people from welfare to work.

I also said I wanted to pass an infrastructure program this spring that not only will fix roads, bridges and mass transit systems, but build new ones.

I said I wanted a program that will not only help fix and rehabilitate old schools; but I wanted a program that will build new classrooms for communities squeezed by growing enrollments and communities whose tax base is shrinking.

I want a program that will help schools pay for a new science lab, a computer lab, a recreation field, new stairs, a new roof, a new gym floor, and new heating and air conditioning systems.

Why not all of these things?

The need is there.

I said I wanted a program that will help deal with critical water and sewer systems, urban brownfields, parks and recreation areas and a host of local infrastructure needs.

While we work to improve our highways and our mass transit, we must improve our educational systems and structures, we must protect our environment and add to our quality of life.

This is the program that will begin to do all that.

It's called Illinois FIRST -- A Fund for Infrastructure, Roads, Schools and Transit.

Five years.

\$12 billion.

That is a good start.

This program is the product of a lot of hard work, many meetings and hearings and the input of hundreds of people from across this great state.

This program will reach into every corner of our state.

It will address needs that are urban, suburban and rural.

It will present us with the opportunity to prepare our state for the future.

And it will give us the chance to make sure that we leave our children a better Illinois than the one we inherited.

Last February, I created an Infrastructure Task Force that surveyed the needs of this state and developed recommendations to fix those needs.

I want to publicly acknowledge and thank the chairman of the Task Force, John Glennon, and Vice Chairman, Ed Bedore and the members of the panel, for their hard work and dedication.

Most are here today in the gallery.

The Task Force identified some \$12 billion in critical infrastructure needs that I believe we must address now.

Now -- not in the fall, not next spring, not after the next election.

We have heard that song for too long.

If we don't act with courage and vision now, to bring long lasting change, the opportunity of today's market and interest rates may well be gone.

How foolish that would be.

We would be faced with the choice of paying twice as much tomorrow for what we need to have done today.

We cannot allow the state's infrastructure to continue to crumble in the name of some unreasonable fiscal fear -- some fear of the future, or some dire warnings about the dangers of borrowing.

I'm sure that most everyone in this chamber has gone into debt for 20 or 30 years to buy a home.

A mortgage is a necessary part of fulfilling the American dream.

It is not a ticket to disaster.

We should not be afraid to meet these challenges.

The state's needs can be divided into four basic categories -- transportation, mass transit, schools and quality-of-life projects.

This program meets all of those critical needs.

Illinois FIRST will add \$4.1 billion to the state's existing surface and air transportation programs.

This program proposes \$3.7 billion more that will enable us to repair an additional 1,000 miles of road, fix an additional 125 bridges and deal with traffic congestion problems across the state.

It will enable us to provide approximately \$600 million more to local governments for their transportation needs.

I want to work with all of you to make the projects we have all talked about for so long a reality.

I want to work with Sen. Cullerton and Rep. Erwin to reconstruct Wacker Drive in Chicago.

It will do great things for the downtown area and will add to the great efforts of Mayor Daley to keep Chicago a first-class city.

I want to work with senators Philip and Fawell, and representatives Daniels, Wojcik and Persico to clean up congestion on Golf, Higgins and Roselle Roads -- the so-called Schaumburg Triangle.

We've already committed to fixing the Hillside Strangler and this will take care of the "Schaumburg Strangler."

And, we will add new lanes to Route 53.

I want to work with Senator Halvorson and Rep. Giglio to add new lanes to Interstate 80 from the Bishop Ford Expressway to the Indiana border to ease congestion and to bring increased economic opportunity to the south suburbs.

I want to work with senators Donahue and Demuzio and representatives Myers, Tenhouse and Ryder to continue building the new Route 67 and to build Route 336 from Quincy to Macomb.

I want to work with senators Bowles and Watson and representatives Davis and Stephens to finish the Alton Bypass.

How long have we waited for that????

I want to work with Sen. Rea and representatives Wollard and Fowler on the expansion of Route 45 between Harrisburg and Eldorado.

I want to work with Sen. Bomke and representatives Klingler and Hannig to make Route 29 between Springfield and Taylorville a safer highway.

I want to work with senators Hawkinson and Shadid and representatives Slone and Leitch on rebuilding Interstate 74 through the heart of Peoria.

And I want to work with Sen. Sieben and representatives Mitchell and Lawfer on widening Route 20 between Freeport and Galena.

The whole Northwestern part of the state is opening up and providing great opportunity to a lot of people.

We must help that along.

And, there's more.

We can fix another 125 bridges, repair a lot of highways and kick in \$600 million to local government for their transportation needs.

The transportation plan includes \$160 million more for airport projects; \$150 million more for railroad grade crossing safety; \$100 million more to continue preparing our state for tomorrow's high-speed rail network; and finally, \$50 million to allow Secretary of State Jesse White to replace those rusting 17-year-old license plates.

If we don't succeed in making mass transit work we will end up with more congestion more lost time from work and more pollution.

Have any of you ever seen the smog in Mexico City or the congestion in Tokyo?

We cannot let that happen here!!!

We must make some crucial long-term decisions.

This is not a time to be timid, or to hope for days long gone by.

We need to see the future.

We need to see our place in it.

And, we need to act now.

For Northeastern Illinois, the RTA, Pace, Metra and the CTA are absolutely critical.

They have to find a way to provide service.

We have to help and not hinder them.

Illinois FIRST also allocates \$4.1 billion for the mass transportation needs of our state.

This program allows the RTA to borrow more than \$1.6 billion for improvement projects and to potentially capture more than \$2 billion in federal funds money that we've never had access to before because we've never had state matching funds on the table.

Things are different now.

With these new found resources, I can work with senators Munoz and Hendon and representatives Lopez, Silva, Acevedo and Turner to rebuild the Douglas Blue Line.

I want to work with senators Smith and Lisa Madigan and representatives Jones, Fritchey and McKeon to expand service on the Ravenswood Brown Line.

We should all work to restore the fare subsidy for students and the elderly.

Metra will be able to proceed with various new commuter rail projects rebuild its aging infrastructure and provide service extensions with "new start" projects.

Additionally, resources will be available to help rehabilitate mass transit systems in Champaign, Springfield, Peoria, Rockford, Carbondale and 11 other cities, as well as help fund the extension of the MetroLink system in the Metro East area from Belleville to the MidAmerica Airport.

And, as we expand the state's commitment and support for trains and buses, we should give serious consideration to steps that will make sure that our mass transit systems don't end up in trouble again.

I believe local communities and mass transit districts, including the RTA, should be given the ability by the General Assembly to increase or modify their local resource bases for infrastructure needs, if they so choose.

The state must cooperate more effectively with local governments.

Local governments that are willing to support their own infrastructure needs should get state help to make those improvements a reality.

By ensuring that local matching funds are available, the possibility for local governments to receive federal matching funds will be more likely.

I propose that we give them the "self-help" tools they need to improve their communities and to take advantage of available federal funding and bonding opportunities.

My plan will take our existing school construction program and double its size.

That means construction and repair money for Chicago, Oak Park, Wheaton, Grayslake, Carbondale, Jersey County, Lawrence County, the Quad Cities, Effingham and Wilmington.

The State's commitment to build new classrooms and repair aging schools will increase to

\$2.2 billion all matched by an equal commitment from local school districts.

At the end of five years, our State will have directed a total of \$4.4 billion for the basic needs of our children and grandchildren.

And when that money is combined with the \$3 billion in school construction funds already committed by the City of Chicago, we have almost met the \$8 billion spending goal that the federal government estimated that we need to spend on classrooms throughout this state.

Finally -- and very importantly -- this program includes \$1.6 billion in projects to boost the economy and improve the overall quality of life throughout Illinois:

This program will improve the environment, provide for recreation, promote job training, support technology and increase our educational resources.

It will open up new opportunities for people in all communities.

The possibilities range far and wide across this state.

I want to work with Speaker Madigan to help protect and restore Chicago's greatest natural resource -- it's Lake Michigan shoreline.

And I want to work with Sen. Emil Jones to bring new life to one of the city's great treasures -- the Pullman National Historic Site;

We will work together on flood control in DuPage County; Wastewater and drinking water upgrades in Evanston, New Lenox, Dixon, Jacksonville and Edwardsville.

We must clean-up unused urban brownfields and cap abandoned oil wells.

My plan will provide economic development incentives to help local communities attract new jobs.

This plan will help support the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield and a fine arts center at Eastern Illinois University.

My program also promotes public safety.

I want to work with senators, representatives and officials throughout Illinois to put in place a secure, comprehensive, state-of-the-art State Police and public safety radio and data transmission system.

We need to replace the patch-work of obsolete systems upon which Illinois citizens have had to depend upon in emergencies.

We can't wait any longer.

Illinois First is also a strong investment in Illinois' human infrastructure.

Sixty percent of the money we will spend -- over \$7 billion -- will go to wages for working men and women in every part of our state.

This program will power a gigantic economic engine that will bring jobs and hope to every section of our state and allow more and more of our citizens to participate in the prosperity and empowerment that this program will produce.

This program takes leadership.

I am asking this General Assembly to boost state revenues by roughly \$621 million a year to make the vision we share, a reality.

I'm proposing a \$48 increase in the annual vehicle registration fee for cars and light trucks.

And, a 15 percent increase in yearly registration fees paid by the owners of large trucks.

I'm proposing a \$37 increase in the fee charged to transfer a vehicle title from one owner to another.

These proposals will generate \$560 million annually -- most of it for transportation projects.

Even with these increases Illinois will only rank 31st among the states in the total cost a motorist must pay to register a vehicle.

And, we will be close to the national average in truck registration fees.

I'm also proposing an increase in the state's liquor tax.

This increase will raise Illinois to the national median and generate \$62 million a year.

I believe we should dedicate those funds to our schools and quality of life projects.

The last time the tax on beer and distilled spirits was raised was in 1969 -- 30 years ago.

The tax on wine was last raised 40 years ago in 1959.

To put that in perspective, more than 50 members of this General Assembly were not old enough to drink beer the last time we saw even a modest increase in the state's liquor tax.

That's how long it's been since we've seen even a modest increase in the state's liquor tax.

Paying an extra penny for a mixed drink, or a glass of wine or a bottle of beer is not going to be a burden on anyone.

With this package of added resources, we can establish a revenue stream to fund an additional \$4.3 billion in state bonds and to pay for \$2 billion in projects on a pay-as-you-go basis over the next five years.

This program combines bonding with pay-as-you-go directives.

I'm proposing this balanced approach so we can provide our children opportunities for the future.

In all, the state's funding commitment will total \$6.3 billion.

That commitment will allow us to leverage local and federal funds to maximize our program dollars.

In all, our program is a unique opportunity to establish a partnership between state, federal, and local governments.

It's a partnership that can broaden the shoulders of the great City of Chicago.

It's a partnership that can help ease the tensions of growth in the Metro East area, in NorthEastern Illinois, and in every community that is struggling to meet the demands of growth.

It's a partnership that can open up new opportunities in Quincy and Macomb; Harrisburg and Eldorado; Rockford and Galena.

It's a partnership that can build and repair classrooms so teachers don't have to teach in closets and boiler rooms and so that students won't have to dodge rain dripping through leaky roofs.

It's a partnership that will clean up environmental mistakes that plague our communities and prevent economic expansion.

It's a partnership that will make sure that water in Ford Heights and many other communities runs crystal clear and not brown as it does now.

Illinois FIRST is a partnership.

We need to do this together.

We need to renew our commitment to every citizen and to every community in Illinois.

This program is funded by all new revenues.

None of our surplus is used for this program.

In the last week, the Illinois FIRST program has generated strong support from across the state from local officials from organized labor from business groups from the education community and from the media.

We have before us a great opportunity, and we face a great challenge.

We have to meet this challenge now.

This state's infrastructure needs will not go away if we sit on our hands and do nothing.

The longer we wait, the worse it will get.

Doing nothing is not an option.

Our roads and classrooms and transit systems will only deteriorate faster.

This program will not endanger our credit rating.

It will not take money away from schools or social services and it will not deflate our strong economy.

As I said, this is new money for new projects.

Illinois FIRST will create jobs and keep people working and it will make our economy stronger for the future.

This is not the time to hesitate.

**THIS IS THE TIME TO ACT.**

I have described our needs. If we don't act now, our needs will not go away, they will only grow.

A leaky roof leads to structural decay; poor water quality affects public health; a marginally-safe bridge becomes unusable.

The cost of borrowing money will increase and plans and priorities will have to be revisited once again.

This plan is not a pure pay-as-you-go plan, but a substantial portion of the costs will be paid now.

Half will be paid for in the future.

For those who would say "we must never ask the future to share these costs," I can only ask "what kind of future will our children and grandchildren have if we don't act now."

To not move forward at a time when our capacity to act is at its peak would be foolhardy.

Our needs will only grow if we don't act now.

Roads won't repair themselves.

Bridges won't grow new steel.

Critical water supplies won't be spontaneously cleansed.

And schools won't sprout new classrooms and labs.

None of these vital needs will be met unless we act now.

If our partnership in this session is really going to prepare Illinois for the year 2000 and beyond; if our legacy is going to mean anything then we need to approve this program this session.

I ask you to help me make our last great act of this century the first great act of Illinois' new century.

Thank you very much.